



Hazlett, I. (2016) Church and Church/State relations in the Post-Reformation reformed tradition. In: Lehner, U. L., Muller, R. A. and Roeber, A. G. (eds.) The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600-1800. Series: Oxford handbooks. Oxford University Press: New York, NY. ISBN 9780199937943.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/147374/>

Deposited on: 5 September 2017

Enlighten – Research publications by members of the University of Glasgow  
<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk>

# CHURCH AND CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS IN THE POST-REFORMATION TRADITION

Ian Hazlett

University of Glasgow

## ABSTRACT

This chapter portrays Reformed positions on the church, church-state relations, and the sacraments. The first introduces perspectives in relation to predestination and covenant theology, and in contrast to the Church of Rome; it considers the definition of the church and the relationship between a congregation and the church catholic; it illustrates how the visible church was identified; it shows how church authority was understood; it examines the ministerial order, and then depicts the rationale for presbyterial polity. The church-state relations portion highlights the contrast between some who stood out for a distinct, autonomous spiritual jurisdiction alongside the civil sphere and others who surrendered responsibility to the state; issues of obedience, disobedience and active resistance to tyrannical rule are also indicated. The section on the sacraments deals with them generally and then in relation to baptism and the Eucharist. It is demonstrated that on many matters there was no seamless homogeneity within the Reformed world.

**Key words** The church; ministry; governance; church-state relations; resistance theory; baptism; the Lord's Supper

## Introduction

The "Leiden Synopsis", an orthodox Reformed digest, aimed to "make clear to all and sundry that there is total unanimity in what we believe and think, and that we share a consensus in all the heads of theology" (Leiden Synopsis 1625, \*4). The Synopsis included the church and sacraments. On both there was a working consensus in Reformed circles, but no complete homogeneity, especially on ecclesiology. Post-1600 sacramental thought was stable and consistent. Historic differences between "Zwinglian" and "Calvinist" perspectives diminished, although discord with Lutherans remained. Ecclesiology was potentially controversial especially when one includes episcopalian and congregationalist churches in Britain as Reformed. If they rejected the Reformed brand of ecclesiology, they still shared large swathes of Reformed doctrine. Initially such diversity (including church-state relations and liturgy) was not a breaker of fellowship or solidarity. However, later statements according confessional (and so divine) status to particular concepts of ministerial order, church polity, and discipline, strained fraternal links. Serious disruptions were confined mostly to Britain from c.1580-1660. General solidarity was explicable by the need for survival and identity-protection in a world where the fortification of Reformed institutions was paramount. It was helped by the Reformed attitude which assumed unity of faith while

accepting at least verbal flexibility on some doctrines and adaptation to regional circumstances. Anyway, the Reformed could not insist on Procrustean uniformity, there being no mandate and machinery to impose that. There was, then, a slight tension between the Leiden Synopsis's "total unanimity" and 'shared consensus', since even within Reformed orthodoxy there were areas of less zip-fastened thought.

After 1600 most Reformed-theology textbooks tended to minimize internal and ecclesiological and sacramental differences. It was in the mid-seventeenth British Isles, especially England, that mayhem occurred over ecclesiology with total discord and disruption prevailing for a generation. (Dorner 1871, 49-65).

As for the sacraments: from about 1600 the previous high temperature surrounding the issue subsided. Respective positions became embedded. Most authors wrote with relative restraint, if robustly and in a doctrinaire fashion. The Lutheran-Reformed divide on the Lord's Supper, christology, and predestination remained, but a peaceable *modus vivendi* set in along with intermittent concord impulses from the Reformed mostly. Among them an increasingly common understanding prevailed on the sacraments, combining perspectives which had originated in Zurich, Strasbourg, Geneva, and Heidelberg, even if from about 1600 onwards the mature Zurich theology appeared to be more influential. From about 1700, thinking on the church and sacraments experienced stasis, as was the case in general (Muller 1987: 96-97). This issued in little creative thinking on those topics. Up till then, Reformed orthodoxy had been shaped with the contours of predestinarian and covenant of grace motifs; the confessional debut of the latter was in the 1643 Westminster Confession, (7).<sup>1</sup> The development bore on ecclesiology and the sacraments.

## **1 Ecclesiology**

*Context and basic perspectives:* The chief premiss determining the Protestant Reformation view of the church was that repentant believers are saved solely by God's mercy and the merit of Christ, the only mediator, thus excluding human contribution. This was reiterated in Reformed confessions of faith. Conceptions of church, ministry and sacraments followed logically, reinforced by predestinarian and covenant theology to ring-fence redemption as unilaterally divine and its particularist application. This determined the continuing rejection of the Roman view of the infallible church. In Reformation thought, the visible church not being a divine institution does not dispense salvation – it only proclaims it. Excluded is all human and institutional input or guarantees. As the Irish Articles (1615) stated : "We must renounce

---

<sup>1</sup> All confessions cited are in Pelikan and Hotchkiss 2003, vol. 2 , and vol. 3 (Savoy Declaration).

the merit of all our said virtues, of faith, hope, charity ... we must trust only in God's mercy and the merits of ... our only redeemer, saviour and justifier, Jesus Christ" (36). Church and sacraments are considered in this light.

The Genevan Francisco Turretino (1623-87) remarked that the fiercest controversy of the age was over church (Turretino 1685, 18.1.1). For the Reformed, belief in the true and invisible church of Christ was a creedal article. This ruled out trust and faith in the visible church, a fallible body. Therefore Roman criteria for an authentic church were dismissed. The Zurich theologian, Johannes Heidegger (1633-98) dismissed Roberto Bellarmino's (1542-1621) fifteen notes of true Catholic identity (Heidegger 1732, 26.76-91). For Protestant thinkers those marks can harbour error, corruption and impurity; they cannot validate a true church, especially when their operation seems to derogate from the exclusiveness of Christ's redemptive work. Turretino noted: "One cannot prove the Church of Rome to be the true church, because it clashes with the fundamentals" (Turretino 1685, 18.14.6).

*Defining the church:* Reformed vocabulary is traditional. The true church is invisible, one, holy, the body or bride of Christ, catholic or universal, the communion of saints, militant, triumphant, eternal, and infallible. The Reformed vision adapted this to decretal predestination and the covenant of grace (Hauschild 1999, 446-491), the double divine framework, operated by the Trinity, sustaining the true church. This church exists partly in the visible church – but elusively, and it can even exist on earth without a visible church. The true, invisible church is not so much a community of the elect as the spiritual convocation of elect individuals, past, present and future. They have the saving faith gifted by God, have responded to the call of the Word and the Spirit, and enjoy communion with Christ and each other. They have, therefore, "effectual calling", that is, are living in a state of grace, regenerated and exercising righteousness. For them, the visible church is a cradle in the process of salvation – comparable to the "chain of salvation" whereby "salvation is ordained by God in Heaven, promised by the Word in Scripture, merited by Christ in man's nature, sealed by the sacraments in the church, received by faith in the heart" (Wollebuis 1660, frontispiece).

In Reformed thinking, the word "church" always needs clarification, since identifying its proper membership needs discrimination. Heidegger envisaged a threefold category of individuals – the uncalled elect, the elect called externally, and the effectually called. This means that "All citizens of the Church are elect, but not all elect are citizens of the Church" (Heidegger 1732, 26.6). Such thinking is traceable to the 1530 *Reckoning of Faith* (6) by

Zwingli (1484-1531). Accordingly, the invisible and visible churches were not identical, the former an object of faith, the latter a societal body in which there can be faked faith.

Nonetheless, the true church could still be within the visible church, but only partially. This provoked the Roman rebuke that this meant two churches, reducing the true church, unsignposted, to a Platonist utopia. Reformed writers denied this, for profession of faith and institutional church membership do not necessarily imply communion with Christ. Yet the two churches may still coincide. When they do overlap, they are indeed one, but not empirically. It is outside the true church that there is no salvation, not outside the visible church whose holiness is unsteady and to which uncalled elect might not even belong.

However, there were blurring tendencies. The Westminster Confession affirmed that “outside [the visible church] there is no *ordinary* possibility of salvation” (25.2) Seeing that this seemed to bar any elect outside the visible church not yet called by the Word, or those not yet effectually called, it looks like a constriction, but only *prima facie*. Moreover, the extraordinary salvation was conceivable in the Zurich theology. Following Zwingli’s idea that one may also wish for the eternal life of virtuous pagans and that God had some allies among Gentiles, the Second Helvetic Confession observed that while “there is no *certain* salvation outside [the Church] ... we know that God had some friends in the world outside the commonwealth of Israel” (17.13-14).

Within Reformed theology, there was no unanimity on the relationship between the parish congregation and the visible church Catholic. The predominant thinking was that the local church was a particular embodiment of the wider church. The latter is the ecclesial starting point and has precedence, for to the “catholic visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles, and ordinance of God, for the gathering and perfecting of saints” (Westminster Confession, 25.3), delegated locally. All parochial gatherings of Christians are subordinate to that. An alternative ecclesiology was advanced by English puritans like John Owen (1616-1683), William Ames (1576-1633), and Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) (Trueman 2013, 285-88). This was that the local congregation is sovereign. It has precedence and is independent of any higher ecclesiastical authority, since in the local congregation Christ’s authority is not mediate, but direct through the Spirit (via pastors). It is, then, the true visible church, as it were. Their key text was Ephesians 4:4. The local church is part of the one mystical body of Christ, united with the Spirit, and a union of faith and love to be manifested on the last days. Such a pneumatology determined this alternative ecclesiology (Wisse and Meijer 2013: 505-09). It repudiates the notion that church unity in Christ can only be operate via a corporate, superior institution. This explains why congregationalists accepted

most of the Westminster Confession except its ecclesiology and church-state relations. They defined the church as the visible, local, empirical congregation of saints or believers separated from the world. Their Savoy Declaration (1658) rejected the authority of any higher ecclesiastical body by affirming that “the visible catholic church of Christ [does not] have any officers to rule or govern in, or over, the whole body” (26.2). The local congregation is autonomous. This is far removed from Reformed orthodoxy, but it does emanate from within the Reformed theological family.

*Identifying the visible true church:* The formal marks of a proper church were usually seen as threefold: preaching, two sacraments, and church discipline, and was the standard view (Leiden Synopsis 1625, 40.45). The context was demarcation from the Roman Church, seen as “untrue” or at least “impure.” Puritans also applied the last epithet to the reformed Church of England. However, in respect of the stated marks, the numerical figure was not always fixed at three. The third, discipline, was not always formally cited as a mark in the pre-1600 era, even if discipline was common to all Reformed churches – “an absolute necessity in the church”, as the Second Helvetic Confession stated (18.20). The role of discipline and its complementary value in the Christian life was always affirmed.

Discipline as a third mark originated with Johannes Oecolampadius (1482-1531) in Basel and Martin Bucer (1491-1551) in Strasbourg, but the sole two marks of preaching and the sacraments as in the Augsburg Confession were adhered to by John Calvin (1509-1564) and some confessions, while others like the Scots Confession specified three marks. Preaching and the sacraments, conductors of the Word, constitute the Church; without them there can be no church, whereas hypothetically there could be an exemplary church without discipline. However, it is notable that later, the two or three marks were expressed in more hierarchical terms, so that the sacraments and preaching were not co-equal. The transition from the idea of several necessary marks to an actual emphasis on ultimately only one “necessary and perpetual mark” of the church, the Word and orthodox doctrine, was made by Théodore de Bèze (1519-1605) (Maruyama 1978, 159-73). A century later Benedict Pictet (1655-1724) echoed this: “Above all is the pure preaching of the divine Word”, for the sacraments and discipline can be out of service (Pictet 1696: 13.6.2). This helps explain why within Reformed churches massive predominance was accorded to preaching and teaching (orthodox doctrine), especially since Communion was infrequent. The primacy of preaching also pervades the Westminster *Directory for Public Worship* (1645).

On the interaction between the marks, there is variety of vocabulary, formulation and presentation among post-Reformation writers. Definition in terms of two or three, or even of “marks”, is not decisive. Some said that the only marks are doctrine and discipline, where doctrine includes preaching, and “discipline” the sacraments. And while the Westminster Confession, avoiding “marks”, cites the church as having “the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God” (25), it is elsewhere that discipline is mentioned in terms of the power of the keys – delegated by Christ to the “officers of the church” (30).

*Church authority:* Identifying an authentic church also mutated into terms of a threefold “church authority”: ministry, order, and discipline. The first is preaching and administering the sacraments. Both transmit the divine promise of forgiveness of sins for the repentant, so that the minister has no personal authority.

The second authority, order, safeguards right faith and practice based on Scripture which preceded the outward church; it explains and protects them from error, as by a confession of faith. A confession is a testimony of faith, not a norm of it and not conscience-binding. A confession is useful and provisional, but the church does not stand or fall by it. As Turretino put it: Scripture is divine and infallible, but confessions are “human documents” which cannot bind the conscience “except so far as they are found to be in agreement with the Word” (Turretino 1685, 18.30.9-10). The church also regulates worship while permitting degrees of liberty. In contrast, episcopalian Reformed churches were less permissive, as they adhered to prescriptive liturgies, seen as a better way of habituating the people into the divine plan of salvation.

The third power is discipline, seen as pastoral and pedagogical, not punitive. Sins causing public offence, moral or doctrinal, trigger discipline and could entail minor or major excommunication. The latter, reversible on repentance, usually meant social exclusion and isolation; but only denunciation was in order, not fulminating damnation. While discipline’s rationale was to keep Christ’s church pure, it was also intended to help save sinners, and to stay God’s wrath in the face of profanity (Westminster Confession, 30.3). High profile excommunication could also involve the civil authority.

*The ministry:* The sole head of the church is Christ, but his rule in the external church operates through human agency – the ministry. This offers salvation mediately and instrumentally as “God’s co-workers.” Such ministry is upheld against Anabaptist and spiritualist notions, which envisaged direct rule by Christ through the Spirit. It is also opposes the traditional Roman concept of priesthood, seen as a spiritual caste lording it over Christian

consciences and appeasing the Deity rather than performing ‘service.’ Essential is vocation along with inward and outward calling, the latter corporately, followed by ordination. Rigorous testing established authenticity and secured accreditation, as ministry is holy, and ministers are sent by Christ. This is an ordinary call. An extraordinary call involving no ecclesiastical vetting and so “immediate” was possible. God initiates it “either to set up a new regime in the Church or to restore one that has collapsed” (Wollebius 1634, 1.26.3). Examples of this are rare. It was a hypothetical idea inspired by examples in Scripture. In Reformed thought, clarified earlier by de Bèze, the extraordinary ministry was foundational, once and for all only, while its legacy continued in the ordinary ministry (Maruyama 1978, 233-35). Consequently apostolic succession is not of persons but of doctrine. This is why some (like de Bèze) cite apostolic, that is, orthodox doctrine as the cardinal mark of the church linked to preaching and the sacraments. Turretino concurred: “the true church of Christ is wherever apostolic doctrine is presented along with the legitimate use of the sacraments and preaching” (Turretino 1685, 18.12.11).

Normative in the Calvinian Reformed theory of ministry is that the right of calling a minister is exercised by the wider representative church, like a district presbytery or synod – an assembly of ministers and elders exercising the *presbyterium*, and thereby conciliar and collegial authority. A civil figure of authority could attend an installation in an acknowledging or confirming role, but ultimately, church autonomy was crucial, especially for the Genevan tradition. By the 1600s such a view was being challenged. English independents or congregationalists ascribed the right of electing a minister to the local congregation only. Or, local patrons could claim the right of appointing ministers. Or, episcopal Reformed churches in the British Isles reserved rights to a bishop.

The fourfold ministry was implanted in core Reformed tradition, despite de facto contraction to three. The first two were pastors (or ministers) and doctors (teachers). They were teaching presbyters, and reflect the Reformation concern with the cognitive appropriation of the faith and its articulation. There was no unanimity about the office of a church doctor in practice, so that it never materialized. The lack of scriptural precision helps explain this, as the Dutch theologian, Petrus van Mastricht (1632-1706) pointed out (Mastricht 1724, 7.2.20). The third and fourth offices in the fourfold model were adjunctive elders and deacons. The (ruling) presbyters or elders saw to governance and discipline, and met with the pastor in committee (session). Deacons dealt with money and alms. The actual threefold ministry, “ordinary and perpetual” (Maruyama 1978: 233), became the norm. It was



epitomized in the Westminster Assembly's *The Form of Presbyterian Church Government* (1645).

*Church government:* Within broad Reformed Protestantism three ecclesiological concepts collided: episcopal, presbyterial, and congregational, all claiming biblical sanction. The first was monarchical, the second aristocratic, and the third as democratic – this last was often characterized as “fanatic”, “anabaptist”, “independent”, “Brownist”, ‘separatist’, or “libertine.” In England there was an intense struggle between these concepts, but the major clash was between episcopal and presbyterial notions. (All agreed, however, that spiritually, Christ was the head of the church.)

Irreconcilable polarization ensued. The presbyterial position was grounded on autonomous spiritual jurisdiction, ministerial parity, and hierarchical conciliar government. What came to make non-negotiable was that it claimed to be scriptural and valid by divine right. It developed as another mark of a true church, a matter of belief, not just preference. It was incompatible with reformed churches in the British Isles that retained the historic episcopate, a hierarchical ministry of bishop, priest or minister, and deacon. For in the end, episcopal apologists also appealed to a divine right theory, based on Scripture and tradition. Thereby, episcopacy was not just a matter of usefulness and well-being in the church, it belonged to the church's essence.

For the early reformers episcopal polity was not a dogmatic issue, even if they set it aside. Bucer, Heinrich Bullinger (1504-75), Calvin, and Peter Martyr (1499-1562) had a pragmatic attitude, at least provisionally: hierarchical episcopacy could be expedient in times of need for reform. In Britain, however, a sharp theological divide fuelled standoffs. The result was a Pyrrhic victory for presbyterianism at the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Its plan was to implement presbyterian polity, but this succeeded only in Scotland (1690).

Presbyterian advocates in Britain were Andrew Melville (1545-1642), Walter Travers (1548-1635) and Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603). Formative interventions came from de Bèze and Hadrian Saravia (1532-1612) (Maruyama 1978, 174-96). In 1575 de Bèze sent a private memorandum to Scotland: “On the Threefold Episcopacy.” He rejected two forms of episcopacy – that of the papacy (tyranny), and that of human convenience and papacy-free tradition (Anglican). The only legitimate episcopacy was God's apostolic order grounded in ministerial equality – the presbyterian principle. Novel here was that the divine order and the presbyterian system were considered identical. This challenged episcopacy by divine right, leading to an exchange of publications between de Bèze and Saravia 1590-1610 (Maruyama

1978, 174-95). Saravia considered ministers (bishops, pastors, deacons, elders) as unequal in principle, not only in their functions but also in status. After all, he argued, Apostles were superior to evangelists and prophets, evangelists superior to bishops, and bishops superior to presbyters (priests) or elders. Further, while there is equality in ministry of Word and sacraments, there is inequality in church government. Repudiating this, de Bèze held that the biblical episcopal office, being collective, corresponds to the fourfold *presbyterium* sitting in presbytery or synod as the true “divine episcopacy.” All moderators are *primus inter pares* with no eminence or superior authority. These were the best safeguards against abuse.

Subsequently, the benchmarks were ultimately de Bèze and Saravia. It is notable that some of the defenders of episcopacy (if not by divine right) were otherwise firmly Reformed in theology, like Archbishop Whitgift (1530-1604), William Whitaker (1548-95) and King James VI & I (1566-1625) whose maxim, “no bishop, no king”, increased the stakes. Reformed theologians who argued for a “reduced” or semi-episcopacy to accommodate presbyterianism (as trialled in Scotland 1610-38) included John Reynolds (1549-1607) and the Irish primate, James Ussher (1581-1656). The gap was insurmountable. Thereafter, Bezan doctrinaire presbyterianism became the badge of Reformed church structure. Van Mastricht formulated a classical descriptions of “a threefold joint session of the church ministry: presbyterial, diocesan or classical, and synodal or provincial or national or oecumenical” (Mastricht 1724, 7.2.25)

## **2 Church-State Relations**

*Spheres of competence:* In the Pauline and Augustinian traditions, the reformers evaluated temporal power positively. Their zeal for good relations with the civil authorities was also a reaction to initial Catholic opinion that they were subversive and fomenting anarchy. Zwinglian magisterialism was so strong that distinctive ecclesiastical jurisdiction evaporated. A methodological innovation in theology was that most confessions and textbooks itemized the “magistrate. This elevated the topic to a creedal level involving not just duty and obedience, but also Christian conscience. Subsequent Reformed writers continued this line, but also with discreet consideration of questions of dissent and resistance.

The reformers had also affirmed divine authority for secular government along with its religious responsibility. The two spheres were subject to God, so that Christians straddled both worlds. However, following the Reformation’s elimination of the medieval distinction between the spiritual and lay estates, and its denial that the earthly church embodies necessarily the true and invisible church (the kingdom of Christ), considering church-state

relations in the usual binary manner is an over-simplification. For in Reformation theology, the picture was tri-dimensional: the temporal sphere (state), the spiritual sphere (invisible kingdom of Christ), the visible church (a fallible image of the former). That was the theology. The relative downgrading of the visible church may have encouraged Christian rulers to interfere more in the Reformation open church.

All secular rulers had been characterized as “lieutenants of God” (Scots Confession, 24). They had the second table of the Mosaic law observed as natural law, coercively if necessary, and so for the common good. Moreover, a Christian government ought also to ensure the application of the first table of the divine law dealing with religion – *cura religionis*. This role of watchman referred to securing the “true faith” and “pure worship”, free of idolatry and heresy, as Old Testament reforming monarchs (godly princes) had done. Accordingly, there is a link between the political and religious obligations of Christian rulers. As Pictet expressed it, in religion the rulers are “nurses, shepherds, and fathers” (Pictet 1696, 13.13.3). When listing some of the model kings of Israel, Pictet added Emperor Constantine (AD 272-337). All Reformed theologians welcomed the Constantinian model whereby the state religion embodied in the church enjoys the protection and patronage of the secular authority.

Pictet added a Calvinist note of caution by asserting that this role implies no governmental competence in the church’s spiritual jurisdiction (*in sacra*); he cites the lines of demarcation as doctrine, preaching, the sacraments, conscience, church discipline, and the ministerial office (Pictet 1696, 13.13.4). The same point had been made previously by not only the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Irish Articles on the ‘supreme governor of the church’, but also by the Westminster Confession. The two jurisdictions are parallel. Yet the civil supportive role is stressed: while excluded from ministry and discipline, the rulers must maintain church unity and peace, help keep God’s truth pure and whole, suppress heresy and abuses, guarantee church ordinances, convoke synods and attend to ensure transactions conform to the mind of God (23.3). This still grants considerable authority to the government. Moreover, the English parliament vetoed the chapter on distinct spiritual jurisdiction (30.1). This was a typical problem in Calvinist contexts – religio-political reality usually prevailed over church theory.

There was alternative Reformed thinking. The 1658 congregationalist Savoy Declaration endorsed most of the Westminster Confession, but it not only rejected the latter’s views on church government and discipline, it also sought to curtail some of the prerogatives of the magistrate in general religious affairs (*circa sacra*). While the state religion is

Christian and rulers should protect it as a duty to the first table of the law, they need not enforce uniformity in everything. Freedom and toleration should be broadened (although not to Roman Catholics), so that the government should not meddle in doctrinal differences where there is the same “foundation” (Savoy Declaration, 24.3).

Various positions in the Reformed spectrum were irreconcilable. The first, rooted in the Zurich, conceded to the civil authority so much that it led to a unitary entity composed of a *corpus Christianorum* in which the magistrates governed everything. This was not just a state religion, but a state church. Magistrates supervised most aspects of church life and doctrine. Such a fusion (“single sphere”) can be variously designated: radically “Constantinian-Theodosian”, “caesaro-papist”, or “Erastian.” It also appealed to architects of the Church of England. The second was the Genevan tradition stressing not separation between church and state, but their distinctiveness, so that autonomous spiritual jurisdiction of the church must be kept intact to avoid a mixing of secular and spiritual interests. Here the task was to seek the golden mean between the two spheres, especially when they intersected. While collaboration was desirable, a special role of the Calvinist church was that of “watchman” to signal encroachment by the rulers, but it was seldom exercised formally. However, the risk of conflict, especially low-level, in this general understanding was very high. The third, the London Savoy concept, kept the magistrate at an even greater arm’s length to the extent that the ancient concept of “one state, one church, one doctrine, one worship” was threatened.

By way of illustration, certain specific areas of church-state interface in the Calvinist tradition were often contentious. One was the calling and installation of ministers. Debates exposed ecclesiological fissures within general Reformed Christianity. “Erastian” magistrates argued for the civil power’s prerogative to appoint ministers – a view articulated by people of Reformed backgrounds like Thomas Erastus (1524-1583), Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), Thomas Coleman (1598-1647) and John Selden (1584-1654), the last two being Westminster divines. Such an issue, which also involved “patronage”, disturbed the Scottish church for centuries to come.

The other issue, church discipline, was double: is the church or the magistrate in charge? – and is the civil power itself subject to discipline? Heidegger in Zurich was sufficiently Calvinist to object to increasing state intrusion on spiritual matters. Complaining about Erastus and Coleman, and appealing to Matthew 18:15-18, he deplored the ideas of confining church authority to preaching and the sacraments, and about rulers’ immunity from church censure (Heidegger 1732, 27.35)

In the 1560s in Heidelberg, Erastus had criticized linking discipline and excommunication to a ban from Communion (Gunnøe 2010: 163-210). Further, he objected to the consistorial courts involving both civil and church officials and the underlying conception of church-state relations. From the Old Testament he concluded that there should only be one government in a Christian state, the civil one, with the exclusive right to penalize offenders. Admiring the Zurich model he denied separate ecclesiastical jurisdiction. A private controversy ensued between Erastus and de Bèze who held that disciplinary competence belongs to the presbytery, not the magistrate, thus insisting on double jurisdiction. The dispute, with Bullinger's collusion, was hushed up until 1589 when the various manuscripts exchanged were published (Maruyama 1978, 112-29). Erastus was lauded in anti-Calvinist Protestant circles, such as the Church of England apologist, Richard Hooker (1554-1600), who cited Erastus in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. At the Westminster Assembly of Divines, opponents of Erastian speakers were the Scots, George Gillespie (1613-1648) and Samuel Rutherford (1600-1662). Their books (1646) on the subject were important contributions to presbyterian theory, namely, Gillespie *Aaron's Rod Blossoming*, and Rutherford's *The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication*. In short, there was no uniform Reformed position on not only discipline, but also church-state relations.

### *Obedience and resistance*

Following Romans 13 the Reformers had taught that the divinely constituted state is owed loyalty and prayerful support, be the rulers Protestant, Catholic, or non-Christian. As the Westminster Confession (23.4) later put it: "Infidelity, or difference in religion, doth not make void the magistrates' just and legal authority." This would seem to rule out disobedience if the sovereign power failed to implement the first table of the divine law, an exception being John Knox (c. 1514-1572). The Reformation's attitude on civil obedience was conservative. They did routinely specify the medieval limitation applying when rulers require anything contrary to the second table of God's law. Already in 1523, Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles (42-43) considered disregarding the "rule of Christ" and arbitrary rule as justifying deposition. This was rooted in medieval political theory. It was not very prominent in Reformed doctrinal textbooks, although Calvin discussed it tentatively, Peter Martyr Vermigli (1499-1562) and de Bèze more expansively. General discussions on how far resistance was permissible or mandatory, should be passive or active, a right and a duty, and popular or by lesser magistrates, were subdued or absent.

Post-1600 Reformed theologians continued in the same vein. Pictet offered a modest ‘something’ on the magistrate (Pictet 1696, 13.13), but no allusion to questions of disobedience or resistance. It was more from individuals faced with religious persecution or arbitrary rule that resistance-theory writings appeared. These spoke of limitation of powers, socio-political contracts or covenants, popular sovereignty, armed or constitutional resistance, the rule of law etc. Catalytic were the St Bartholomew’s Day massacre, the Dutch Revolt, the French wars of religion, the Stewart theory of the divine right of kings, the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the British “Glorious Revolution.” (Hauschild 1999, 206-240).

To cite some representative writers – these are: the reputed lead author of the Huguenot monarchomachian tract, *Defence of Liberty against Tyranny* (1579) – Philippe Duplessis-Mornay (1549-1623), Johannes Althusius (1563-1638), and Samuel Rutherford. The first argued that the monarch is subject to the rule of law. This involves a covenant between God, monarch, and people – the two tables of the divine law. Government is conditional on honouring this covenant; when seriously infringed by the ruler, then popular resistance, even by force, is permissible, but by lesser magistrates. Persecution in the name of the first table causing disorder allows “seditious” action against a “tyrant” (Johnson and Leith 1998: 356-58). The tract was published in the same year as George Buchanan’s (1506-1582) *De jure regni* in Edinburgh; Buchanan had similar ideas, but justified tyrannicide more explicitly. His covenantal schema helped usher in the nemesis of the house of Stewart in Britain.

The Emden jurist, Althusius, reflected on the Dutch Revolt and new republic. Informing his thought were writings Calvin, de Bèze, and Buchanan. In his *Politica* (1603), Althusius equated natural law with the Decalogue and developed a Christian social contract theory. He envisaged popular sovereignty as an image of divine sovereignty, humans being bearers of the image of God. Violations of the tri-partisan covenant threatening the “rule of law” and the “rule of rights”, and thereby natural and divine law, is tyranny meriting constitutional resistance (Witte 2013: 602-05). Similar constitutionalist ideas, but open to violent revolution, are expressed by the Calvinist theologian and political theorist, Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713). Like Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), he held that the “laws of war” can be invoked to depose tyrants (Dodge 1947, 61-67)

A book by the Scottish Westminster Divine, Samuel Rutherford, added to the arsenal of Reformed jurisprudence and resistance theory. This was *Lex, Rex: The Law is King* (1644). In the train of Buchanan, Knox, Melville and the Catholic John Major (1467-1550), Rutherford used the covenant motif as well as the two-kingdom concept of church and state.

He denied monarchical absolute sovereignty; popular consent is conditional, and resistance to tyranny including regicide is legitimate. However, among contemporaries like John Milton (1608-74), Rutherford was denounced for his doctrinaire presbyterianism and opposition to both freedom of conscience and relative religious toleration.

### **3 The Sacraments**

*Generalities:* Post-1600 Reformed sacramental thought reflected continuity with the Zurich Consensus (1549) of Bullinger and Calvin in 1549 (Pelikan & Hotchkiss 2003, 812-17). That represented accommodation between two poles on the Eucharist particularly. The Zurich theology stressed profession of faith, remembrance, symbolism, inwardness and contemplation by those of faith; Christ is only present to the mind. Genevan thinking originated in an amalgam of Luther (1483-1546), Calvin, and Bucer.<sup>2</sup> This could speak of the sacraments as channels and means of grace – at least in a manner of speaking – so that in the Lord's Supper there was a parallel offering or exhibition of the sign and the reality (Christ) signified, merged by a sacramental union. This gift enabled elect believers (especially dispirited ones) to have, through the Holy Spirit, communion with the true body of Christ in Heaven, as fortifying sacramental nourishment.

Bucer had held that inner-Protestant eucharistic controversies were pointless, since fundamental belief, as he saw it, was the same. The Genevan position derived in part from this Strasbourg theology of a *via media* with the Lutherans as embodied in the Wittenberg Concord of 1536; it was viewed with suspicion in German Switzerland (except Basel). For such a concord still seemed both to ascribe too much status to the sacraments as automatic vehicles or instruments of grace, and to associate too much the presence of Christ and his body (located in Heaven) with the sacramental elements; hence it was regarded as still not sufficiently detached from traditional doctrines of the real presence. Any notion that the sacraments might offer and mediate grace somehow inherent in or tied to the sacramental signs was firmly repudiated in later Reformed orthodox thinking.

This apparent Zurich preponderance was arguably coincidental, ensuing rather from the impact of decretal predestination and the covenant of grace. Since the saving faith of the elect in the covenant had been determined eternally and irrevocably by God beforehand, the sacraments were secondary to this. They could not actually impart, offer or mediate what was already acquired through Christ's broken body, although they might help, through the Spirit,

---

<sup>2</sup> On pre-1600 sacramental history and Reformed perspectives, see Wandel 2014, 15-191, Rohls 1997, 177-237, Johnson and Leith 1999, 307-24, McKim 1998, 217-58, Andresen 1988: 46-63, 212-18, 272-84, and Hauschild 1999, 429-433. On post-1600 thought, see Heppe 1950, 590-656, and Wisse and Meijer 2013, 509-14.

apply the benefits of it. This could be by boosting the faltering faith of those effectually called, or helping induce the effectual calling of the unwitting elect. It was possible, then, to consider the sacraments as dispensable, but usually more as not being absolutely necessary for salvation (Leiden Synopsis 1626, disp. 43, cor. 2). However, since sacraments were divine institutions, the church could not abandon them. Yet, reflecting more the Genevan theology, there was still a “hypothetical necessity” for the sacraments, in order to “assist infirmity and weakness” and ‘strengthen faith” (Pictet 1696, 14.1.12). Accordingly, Reformed theology strove to reconcile the prior fact of the salvation of the elect by predestination and covenantal privilege with its ritual offer in the sacraments. The balance between the spoken Word and the visible Word was unequal. The former had primacy, since Reformed writers (recalling Augustine) referred to the sacramental sign as an “appendix”, “appendage”, an accessory not ultimately compulsory; but their use was still mandatory due to their dominical basis. There was another paradox: Reformed theology accepted that the Word was offered to all, but not the visible Word – intended for the worthy elect only. This was a point of conflict with the Lutherans.

Also shaping Reformed sacramental thinking was a spiritualizing thrust and an aversion to materialist notions of grace – a sort of unconscious, inherited Neoplatonism. It derived from Humanism, especially Erasmian. It was metaphysical dualism whereby matter and spirit are antithetical and incompatible, with apparent corroboration in John 6: 63: *The Spirit gives life, the flesh is of no avail*. The invisibility and inwardness of grace is an *idée fixe*. A real presence could not possibly be corporal, tangible or substantial. These dualist notions were early Zwinglian leitmotifs, and while advanced Reformed doctrine made no appeal to them, their effect remained.. The sacramental signs, then, were simply illustrative and instrumental, finite things utterly incapable of bearing anything infinite or divine.

In Reformed sacramental thought the priority was to generate assurance among diffident believers of their election and justification. (In infant baptism the grasp of this assurance was obviously deferred). Certitude of faith was paramount, abandoning the uncertainty that might provoke recourse to self-help. Further, since adoption into the covenant of grace had responsibilities, beneficiaries were reminded of duties to God and neighbour; thereby sanctification accompanying justification is not passive, but a righteous way of life. The sacrament was not something holy per se, rather something that contributes to making holy. God conveys the Word of assurance and promise of grace graphically – like an authentically sealed letter. Reformed terminology, then, became dominated by the defining sacraments as ‘signs and seals of the covenant of grace” (Westminster Confession, 27.1).



Lastly: before 1600 Reformed writings dismissed the sacramental teachings of the Roman Church, Lutheranism and Anabaptists (no infant baptism). After 1600 other heterodoxies were added. These were first: Arminianism, with its element of choice in faith and its less pessimistic anthropology. It diluted original sin and depleted ~~both~~ baptismal cleansing from sin and regeneration. Secondly: Socinianism, with its antitrinitarianism. Since the sacraments were trinitarian institutions in constitution, operation and effect, Socinian reduction of them to moral rites of passage was condemned. Post-1700 Reformed statements fended off other alternatives – not only Baptist, Catholic, Lutheran, Arminian, and Socinian, but also Quaker (no sacraments) and the repristination of original Zwinglianism in Church of England Latitudinarians like Bishop Benjamin Hoadly (1676-1761). The *Lectures in Divinity* (1821) of the Calvinist St Andrews professor, George Hill (1750-1819), exemplify how the gamut of sacramental heterodoxy was dealt with in theology faculties (Hill 1864, 497-517).

*Baptism:* Baptism was envisaged as a ritual acknowledgement of adoption into the divine covenant, ingrafting into Christ, and initiation into the earthly church. If not explicitly stated, this applied only to the elect. While adult baptism was conceivable, it normally involved babies, analogous with Old Testament circumcision. This appeal was grounded in the fundamental unity of the two Testaments. Reformed manuals routinely focussed on the issue due to infant unawareness, so that a proleptic dimension governs the ritual, much being left to future nurture. Baptism proclaims the promise of the forgiveness of sins as in washing from sin; the water signifies the blood of Christ's redemptive sacrifice – “our Red Sea”, as the Belgic Confession (34) had elegantly expressed it. Spiritual rebirth (regeneration) follows, so that a baptized believer is dead to the world of self-destruction.

A selection of representative authors in Spinks's study reflects consistency in the Reformed approach to baptism (Spinks 2006, 50-56). William Ames maintained that the sacrament has three functions – informing, reminding, and sealing of the covenant of grace to the elect, whose role in this as infants is obviously passive. This suggests that being in the covenant and being of the elect are not necessarily the same thing – but this issue was generally treated ambiguously. Ames held that covenantal membership precedes baptism, so that the redemptive significance of the ceremony is relative. Wollebius exemplifies the Reformed tendency to substitute the word ‘seal’ for ‘sacrament.’ He also used the patristic “mystery”, because of the supra-sensory reality conveyed. The “efficient cause” of baptism is the Trinity, and its administrators are solely human agents, the “instrumental cause.” Wollebius added that baptism is not absolutely necessary for the salvation of individuals

illegitimately baptized or who died before baptism. Turretino made the same point. Remarking that the reality signified by the sign is Christ and his benefits, he adds that this boosts faith and eventual public witness not only of thanks to God, but love of neighbour, so that the sacramental gifts of baptism are not just personal. The Westminster Confession (28) highlights that grace is not bound to the sacrament, and that its efficacy is not a necessary consequence. With such thinking, the Reformed tradition avoided sacramentalist false confidence. The Westminster *Directory for Public Worship* reiterates that caveat. Moreover, in justifying infant baptism – the children of believers are part of the covenant of grace before baptism – it affirms that they are already “federally holy.” Later, Thomas Ridgely (1667-1734), had a strongly trinitarian understanding of baptism. Its virtue does not lie in the ordinance per se, but in the operation of the Holy Spirit who conveys the will and blessing of Christ, the sole initiator. Nor is the ritual perfunctory; it is the beginning of holy living and progressive righteousness.

Lastly, the erosion of Reformed soteriology by the eighteenth century is reflected in the modified Genevan baptismal rite introduced in 1724. Still alluding to the Fall and corruption, the force of the previous statement on original sin, going back to Calvin, is attenuated. This reflects an ingress of Arminian ideas. Furthermore, in the new eucharistic liturgy adopted, the same softening of Augustinian pessimistic anthropology is discernible; it is not longer, as it were, “Christ alone”, rather “Christ and I together” as a moral impetus (Grosse 2008, 627-28).

### *The Lord's Supper*

Apart from covenantal and tacit predestinarian orientation, there was little innovative in Reformed eucharistic thought post-1560. New were formalist methodologies. These were not all imitations of each other, as there were varieties of definition, terminology, and even priorities. The starting point was the Last Supper; just as baptism had been anticipated by circumcision, so the Eucharist originated in the Passover. In contrast with the Roman Catholic point of view, the Reformed saw the Last Supper as the first Eucharist, eliminating notions of a sacrifice, an altar, transubstantiation, communion in one kind etc.

As with baptism, the Reformed view of the Eucharist was bifocal. There were parallel realities – visible and invisible, physical and spiritual, letter and spirit, external and internal, sign and reality, celebrant and originator, instrument and divine institution, finite and infinite, tangible and intangible, earthly and heavenly, human and divine, food for the body and for the soul and so on. Heidegger articulated it neatly: “The food and the drink of the eucharistic

feast are twofold, one being symbolical, corporal and visible – bread and wine, the other real, spiritual and invisible – the body of Christ broken for us and his blood shed for us for remission of sins” (Heidegger 1732, 25.104). This perception aligned with the early Reformed perceptions, particularly of Bucer and Calvin; it was also compatible with Zurich concerns that between the sign and reality signified there was no mixture, mutual co-inherence, (con)fusion, conjunction, local inclusion and organic merging, since Christ’s body is in Heaven. There were still rhetorical analyses of the meaning of “*This is my body*”, since a literal meaning was excluded (repudiating transubstantiation and Lutheran notions of the ubiquity of Christ’s body). Yet the truth of sacramental body of Christ was upheld in view of inner-Reformed agreement that the sacrament was more than a commemorative occasion and that the signs were not bare and empty “no bark without core” (Heidegger 1732, 25.111). A concept originating in Luther – the ‘sacramental union’ – was availed of. The Reformed used this to affirm that for true believers only (and so not objectively, a sticking point with the Lutherans) the bread is Christ’s body sacramentally, mystically, and spiritually under the sole aegis of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables the sacramental and spiritual, but not oral, eating and enjoyment of the substance of Christ’s body in Heaven – the food of salvation and earnest of resurrection. This communion is sharing in the merit and benefits of “Christ crucified” (Westminster Confession, 29.7), whose body is both *represented* and substantially *presented* in the sacrament (Irish Articles, 94). Accordingly, the sacramental encounter with Christ, human and divine, related to the entire ceremonial and trinitarian actions, not to be minimized by focussing narrowly on the elements which do not cause Communion..

This suggested that with many provisos Reformed thought regarded the sacrament Lord’s Supper as a channel of grace, but it also held back from making it an absolute necessity. The Word saved, not the sacrament. The beneficiaries were the true believers whose faith was strengthened by feeding on the body of Christ in this nutritional sacrament, as Calvin had believed; but the elect were already saved. The Supper was intended for them above all – a “feast of the fellowship of the covenant of grace” (Heppe 1950, 629, 635). Sacramental grace was endorsing, not constitutive. As the Irish Articles (92) framed it: it is a sacrament of “preservation in the church, sealing unto us our spiritual nourishment and continual growth in Christ.”

Finally, it was characteristic of the Reformed churches in general to press for sacramental concord with the Lutherans in the interest of Protestant unity. While the impetus was often religio-political initiated by British and Prussian rulers and Huguenot leaders – emboldened in part by the Polish Sendomir Consensus (1570) – theological argumentation in

this cause came now also from Zurich. This was new, for previously Zurich had been the chief obstacle. Two examples were first, Theodor Zwinger (1597-1654), whose *Erklärung* pleaded (optimistically) for concord with the Lutherans on the basis of the 1534 First Confession of Basel (Zwinger 1655, 78-79). The other, more extensive, was Heidegger's *Manuductio*. He affirmed, citing Bucer, that "there is nothing to be found in [the Augsburg Confession] that differs from the thinking of our confessions" (Heidegger 1687, 22, 220-23). A breakthrough remained elusive.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary sources

- Heidegger, Johannes H. 1732. *Corpus theologiae christianae*. Zurich.
- . 1687. *In viam concordiae protestantium ecclesiasticae manuductio*. Zurich.
- Heppe, Heinrich. 1950. *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*. Trans. G.T. Thomson. Revised and edited by Ernst Bizer. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Hill, George. 1834. *Lectures in Divinity*. 6<sup>th</sup> edn. Edinburgh & London.
- Johnson, William Stacy, and Leith, John H., eds. 1993. *Reformed Reader: A Sourcebook in Christian Theology*. Volume 1: *Classical Beginnings, 1519-1799*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Leiden Synopsis. 1625. *Synopsis purioris theologiae*. Leiden.
- Mastricht, Petrus van. 1724. *Theoretico-practica theologiae*. Reprint. Utrecht.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav, and Hotchkiss, Valerie. 2003. *Creeds & Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*. Volumes 2-3. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.
- Pictet, Bénédict. 1696. *Theologia christiana*. Geneva.
- Turretino, Francisco. 1685. *Institutio theologiae elencticae*. Geneva.
- The [Westminster] Confession of Faith, the Larger Catechism, the Shorter Catechism, the Directory for Publick Worship, the Form of Presbyterial Church Government, with Reference to the Proofs from the Scripture*. 1913. Edinburgh: Blackwood.
- Wollebuis, Johannes. 1634. *Theologiae christianae compendium*. Basel.
- . 1660. *The abridgment of Christian divinitie*. Trans. Alexander Ross. 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. London.
- Zwinger, Theodor. 1655. *Erklärung und Rettung der reinen Lehr von dem Abendmal unsers Herren Jesu Christi*. [Basel].

### Secondary sources

- Andresen, Carl, ed. 1988. *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte. Band 2: Die Lehrentwicklung im Rahmen der Konfessionalität*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Dodge, Guy Howard. 1947. *The Political Theory of the Huguenots of the Dispersion With Special Reference to the Thought and Influence of Pierre Jurieu*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dorner, J.A. 1871. *History of Protestant Theology*. Volume 2. Trans. George Thomson and Sophia Taylor. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark.
- Grosse, Christian. 2008. *Les rituels de la cène. Le culte eucharistique réformé à Genève (XVIe-XVIIe siècles)*. Geneva: Librairie Droz.
- Gunnøe, Charles D., Jr. 2011. *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate. A Renaissance Physician in the Second Reformation*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Hauschild, Wolf-Dieter. 1999. *Lehrbuch der Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte. Band 2: Reformation und Neuzeit*. Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser and Güterloher Verlagsges.
- Maruyama, Tadataka. 1978. *The Ecclesiology of Theodore Beza. The Reform of the True Church*. Geneva: Librairie Droz.
- McKim, Donald K., ed. 1998. *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf Stock.
- Muller, Richard. 1987. *Post-Reformation Dogmatics. Volume 1: Prolegomena to Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House.
- Rohls, Jan. 1997. *Reformed Confessions. Theology from Zurich to Barmen*. Trans. John Hoffmeyer. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Spinks, Bryan D. 2006. *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism. From Luther to Contemporary Baptism*. Ashgate: Aldershot and Burlington, VT.
- Trueman, Carl. 2013. "Reformed Orthodoxy in Britain." In *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, edited by Herman J. Selderhuis, 261-91. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Wandel, Lee Palmer, ed. 2014. *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Reformation*. Leiden & Boston: Brill.
- Wisse, Maarten, and Meijer, Hugo. 2013. "Pneumatology: Tradition and Renewal." In *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, edited by Herman J. Selderhuis, 465-518. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Witte, John, Jr. 2013. "Law, Authority and Liberty in Early Calvinism." In *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*, edited by Herman J. Selderhuis, 591-612. Leiden & Boston: Brill.